

Chairman Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Opening Statement
Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health
“Examining the Reauthorization of the Pandemic and
All-Hazards Preparedness Act”
June 6, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

Today, we convene to consider legislation to reauthorize the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA). One century ago our country was in the midst of the worst pandemic in its history, claiming the lives of almost 700,000 Americans and killing more than 50 million people worldwide. As we listen to testimony and discuss this critical legislation, it is paramount that we remember the significance of the centennial anniversary of the 1918 influenza pandemic. On this very day, in 1918, the first large-scale battle of World War I had begun, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers traveled across the Atlantic to be deployed for war. At the same time, sporadic flu activity was spreading throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. In the months following, the country and our soldiers faced an illness that we were not prepared to handle. In that October alone, more than 100,000 Americans died as a result of the Spanish flu.

It goes without saying that we have come a long way. A century later, we are substantially more prepared. As we consider this legislation, we must remember that there is more to be done to bolster America’s public health security.

The creation of the Assistant Secretary of Preparedness and Response under the original legislation in 2006 has helped us to make monumental strides in preparedness, coordination, and response. Close collaboration and efforts between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration, and our state, local, tribal, and territorial public health partners has been vital in making this progress.

Much like politics, much of public health is local and executed on the ground by our hospitals, health departments, and emergency responders who are our front lines addressing infectious diseases, disasters, and threats.

I want to thank my fellow Texan, Dr. Umair Shah, for being here today to share his testimony and for his leadership protecting the health of Harris County. Recently,

Dr. Shah and his team responded on the front lines of Hurricane Harvey, which caused catastrophic damages in the Houston metropolitan area and required a large coordinated response from all of the organizations before you today.

We will hear more about the critical issues that must be addressed to continue to strengthen the nation's preparedness and response capabilities.

We will talk about proposals to strengthen the Strategic National Stockpile, our cache of life-saving medications and supplies for public health emergencies. We also must address the policies that affect our Regional Disaster Response System. It is essential that the program continues to integrate and coordinate at the local level. Additionally, we must provide assurances to protect those who respond to health emergencies.

We also will discuss sustaining robust and reliable security capabilities such as disease surveillance, containment, risk, and countermeasure distribution. We must evaluate the domestic biological surveillance systems such as BioWatch. We must also take a closer look at what can be done to bring these programs up to date, so that they are operating with the most efficient capabilities and technologies. Finally, we must look for innovative ways to continue to advance medical countermeasures, ensuring that Americans can access the medications that will provide critical protection in the future. As we consider the problem antimicrobial resistance in this country, we must discuss new methods to curb this growing problem.

Frontline facilities and responders in Dallas experienced this firsthand in 2014 when a patient presented with Ebola in a DFW emergency department. We must remember that infectious diseases are a mere plane ride away, and we must continue to ensure we are prepared and ready to respond.

This Pandemic All-Hazards Preparedness Reauthorization is critical in protecting the lives of all Americans, and providing the necessary tools and infrastructure are in place when disaster strikes. I want to thank both Representatives Susan Brooks and Anna Eshoo for their work on the draft legislation being considered today.

Lastly, I thank all of our witnesses for testifying before us this morning. I look forward to a productive discussion on the broad array of issues that will be the focus of this reauthorization.